

Religious belief is a deeply personal subject. Religious faith, or the lack thereof, defines largely who we are as a person. It is one of the most profound influences on our individual thoughts and actions. It is inherently difficult for a person of one faith to objectively and completely explain the doctrines and beliefs of another faith. I believe that, as a non-LDS reporter, Mr. Woodward's characterizations of LDS doctrines and teachings may have encountered some of this same difficulty.

As a fourth and fifth generation member of the LDS church, I must admit that I found some of Mr. Woodward's characterizations of my beliefs and the history of the church to be strained or not entirely accurate in some instances, and perpetuates some unfortunate and outdated stereotypes.

However, it is not really appropriate or productive to engage in debate or detailed discussions on religious doctrines and beliefs on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, and that is not my purpose in bringing this subject up tonight. Again, religious belief is deeply felt and personal, and each person should be left to discover and follow his or her own faith.

My purpose in coming to the floor on this subject tonight is seek to dispel the notion inherent in this article that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or LDS Church, is actively seeking to exploit the 2002 Winter Games. I also want to dispel the notion that the Salt Lake Organizing Committee for the 2002 Winter Games is somehow beholden to or acting improperly in concert with the LDS Church.

I think that a few points must be made in counterbalance to Mr. Woodward's article that will help place all of this in perspective.

First, I respectfully disagree with the author's assertion that "[n]ot since the ancient Olympics were held under the gaze of Zeus and his randy band of gods and goddesses have the Games been staged in a local so thoroughly saturated by a single religion."

Approximately 72% of Utahans statewide claim membership to the LDS church. Even though 72% is still a substantial majority, the author failed to point out that within Salt Lake City itself, the figures are roughly 50% LDS members to 50% non-members. He also failed to point out that while many of Utah's prominent government leaders are LDS (which should not be a surprise when reflecting the composition of the general population), he failed to note that the last two mayors of Utah's largest city and capitol, Salt Lake City, including the current mayor, are not Members of the LDS church.

For balance, I think it's important to recognize that religious influences often permeate local cultures wherever one chooses to look. Olympic events have been held in several other venues where there have been even greater religious majorities than Salt Lake City.

For example, I recall the Winter Olympic Games being held in Grenoble, France, in the late 1960's. France's population is over 90% Roman Catholic, and that particular faith and the history of the French people and culture are inseparable. The French have historically viewed their national identity as being intertwined with Catholicism. It is part of "who they are."

Another example is the Winter Olympic Games which were held in Lillehammer, Norway. I recently visited Norway. It is an extraordinarily beautiful country. Approximately 86% of the population are Lutheran. In addition, Lutheranism is the State Church. One could say the same thing about the influence of protestantism on Norwegian culture and politics as that which Catholicism had on France.

Yet another example is the most recent winter games held in Nagano, Japan. 98% of Japanese are followers of the ancient Shinto and Buddhist religions.

I'm sure that if we looked further, we could find other similar examples. Therefore, it should not strike the world, nor the media, as unusual that religion plays an important part in the culture and history of Salt Lake City and its people. To the extent that this fact is newsworthy is the result of decisions made by the media themselves, and is not part of any organized effort on the part of the church or the Salt Lake Organizing Committee. I sincerely hope that the motivation for some of the media coverage of the LDS Church and its doctrines in the context of the 2002 Olympics is not motivated by some religious bias or prejudice based on specific beliefs.

For example, wouldn't it strike most people odd to have Newsweek write articles discussing specific Catholic or Lutheran, or Shinto religious beliefs in detail in the context of an Olympic story in France, Norway or Japan? To some extent, the attention focused on specific LDS religious beliefs in the context of the 2002 Winter Games seems out of place.

Second, I think the author did not adequately express the separateness of the 2002 Winter Games and the Salt Lake Organizing Committee from the LDS Church. They are entirely separate. One is a religious organization and world religion. The other is a secular organization. While there are LDS members who serve on the SLOC Executive Committee, a substantial majority of SLOC officials and employees are not members of the LDS Church.

It has been my experience that both organizations have sought, very diligently, to ensure that there is no undue influence, or even the appearance of undue influence, by the Church on the organization or outcome of the games. Any assertion that there has been undue influence is totally unsubstantiated.

Further, I would like to point out that these are America's Games. They're the world's games. They're not Utah's Games, nor the LDS Church's games. Like any other American city or state, we're proud to host, for a short time, the premier winter sports events in the world.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that people would recognize that the reason that Salt Lake City was chosen to host the 2002 Winter Games is because of its reputation as having the "Greatest Snow on Earth." It has world-class skiing opportunities and venues.

We are all working together to ensure that all visitors feel welcome in Utah and in the United States. If you come to the games, you will have a good time. The focus will be on the athletic competition, as it should be.

We welcome the world to our state. We have nothing to hide and nothing to be embarrassed about. We also have nothing to apolo-

gize for. Utah's citizens of whatever religious background share in their pride and enthusiasm for upholding the Olympic Spirit. There is, and will be, a place at the table for everyone.

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IN HONOR OF BALTIMORE COUNTY  
PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS  
ASSOCIATION—LOCAL 1311

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**HON. ROBERT L. EHRLICH, JR.**

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, October 2, 2001*

Mr. EHRLICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my gratitude and admiration for the men and women of the Baltimore County Professional Fire Fighters Association, Local 1311 of the International Association of Fire Fighters. This organization represents more than one thousand fire fighters, officers, and EMS workers in Baltimore County. Each and every day, these heroes risk their lives serving the citizens of Baltimore County.

In the wake of the tragic and cowardly attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Local 1311 sprung into action. Recognizing that over three hundred and fifty fellow fire fighters lost their lives during the horrific events of September 11, 2001, members of Local 1311 rapidly organized a fundraising drive to assist the families of our fallen heroes.

Inspired by the IAFF's creation of the New York 9/11 Disaster Relief Fund, the association began a direct campaign to solicit donations for this worthy effort. Local 1311 members hit the streets of Baltimore County from September 21–23. Fire Fighters diligently worked street corners and shopping malls asking for contributions. I am pleased to report the public responded generously. While the final tally has not been calculated, approximately \$300,000 was raised for the 9/11 Fund. All Baltimore County Fire Fighters merit our thanks and congratulations.

I want to express my personal thanks to Local 1311 Trustee, Mr. Ted Moffitt, for coordinating the overall effort. The entire leadership of the organization led by President Mike Day, Secretary-Treasurer Jim Kinard, and Office Assistant Elizabeth Grove assisted with logistical support. Finally, my heartfelt thanks and appreciation is extended to Mr. Edwin F. Hale, Chairman of First Mariner Bank, for the support and assistance he and the bank provided in handling, counting, and safeguarding the voluminous amount of coin and currency collected. This group effort represents the best in America; it will undoubtedly provide much needed relief to survivors of our fallen heroes.

Mr. Speaker, fire fighters are truly America's bravest. I applaud the Baltimore County Professional Fire Fighters for their hard work and commitment to their county, country, and fellow citizens.